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The Watkinson Cookbook: My experiences reproducing historic recipes as part of a Watkinson Library Creative Fellowship

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Chapter 1

2012

1.1 September

Julie and Julia and Julia (2012-09-07 14:38)

I am about to embark on a culinary journey. In the midst of my busy senior year, I am going to attempt to cook and/or bake around ten recipes from historic cookbooks. Though ten may not sound particularly ambitious, the process requires finding the books; choosing the recipes; researching their historical and culinary contexts; and converting the measurements, ingredients, and cooking processes into practicable modern terms. With this blog, I will track my progress, my hardships and my triumphs.

People I've told about this project have asked if I'm a *Julie and Julia* fan. The movie based on a blog based on a cookbook seems to be the first thing people associate with ambitious cooking projects. My answer? Not particularly. I didn't read the book. I saw the movie. I do like the idea. But I am not Lawrence Dei, who watched *Julie and Julia* every single day for a whole year and blogged about it ([1]<http://www.lawrenceandjulieandjulia.com/>). I'm a student with a love of all things culinary, an interest in historic foodways, and a Watkinson Rare Books Library CreativeFellow (a student who proposed a unique project using books from the library).

Today I made a list of cookbooks I'd potentially like to use. I decided to limit my scope to cookbooks by American authors. I wanted to start with the Watkinson's earliest cookbook written and published in America. The earliest American cookbook is not as old as one might think. Americans would have, for many years, relied on cookbooks written and published in England. Still more cookbooks, though published in the US, were written by English authors. Despite the fact that the earliest Watkinson cookbook made in America was published in Philadelphia in 1792 (Richard Brigg's *The New Art of Cookery*), it was written by an Englishman and first published in London.

The first cookbook written by an American held by the Watkinson seems to be Eliza Leslie's 1828 *Seventy-Five Receipts for Pastry, Cakes, and Sweetmeats*. So, this is where my journey begins. Updates on my examination of this book and my attempts of recipes therein will be forthcoming.

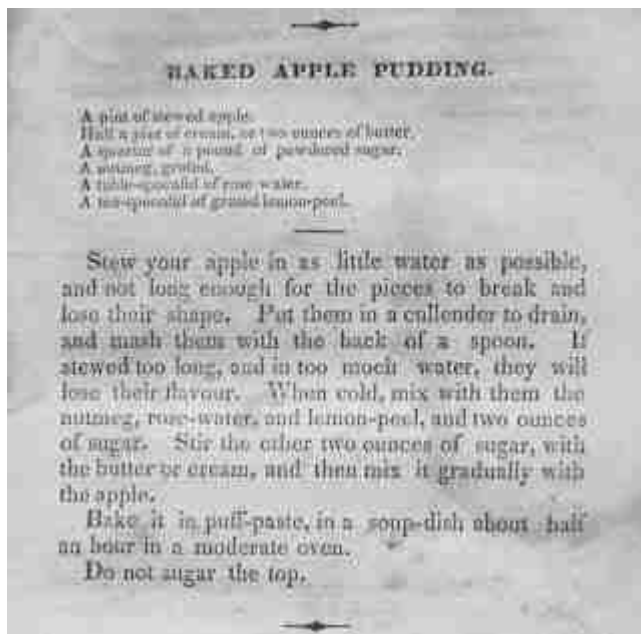
And yes, you can now add another Julia to the *Julie and Julia* food blog trend.

1. <http://www.lawrenceandjulieandjulia.com/>

Apples and Early America (2012-09-18 16:08)

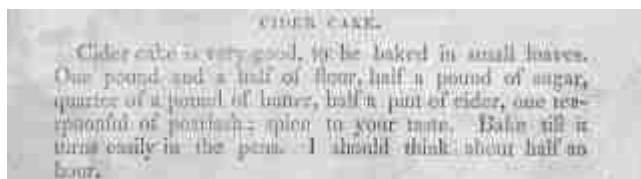
Today I took a trip into the Watkinson stacks to pick out the cookbooks I want to examine. Due to the sheer number of fascinating books, I have altered my project from using one cookbook per session to two. Every other week, I'll pick two cookbooks and two recipes- one from each book- that fit a theme.

This week's theme is Early America. My books for this session are *Seventy-Five Receipts by a Lady of Philadelphia* and Lydia Maria Child's *The American Frugal Housewife*. Both books were originally published in 1828, though the Watkinson owns the 20th edition of *The American Frugal Housewife*, which was released in 1836. I've worked with old books in the past, so the first thing I noticed about these was their comparatively poor condition. These books were stained, worn and falling apart, indicating they were actually used for their intended purpose. There were even handwritten recipes on the inside covers of each book.



[1]

As described in my most last post, I wanted to find some of the first American cookbooks. And indeed, these two books are American and proud. The author of *Seventy-Five Receipts*, Miss Leslie, explains in her introduction, "The receipts in this little book are, in every sense of the word, American." She goes on to describe the need for such a cookbook, saying, "There is frequently much difficulty in following directions in English and French cooking books, not from their want of explicitness, but from the difference in the fuel, fireplaces, and cooking utensils generally used in Europe and America." Whether the need for an American cookbook was actual or perceived, these women were among the first to identify and cater to this market.



[2]

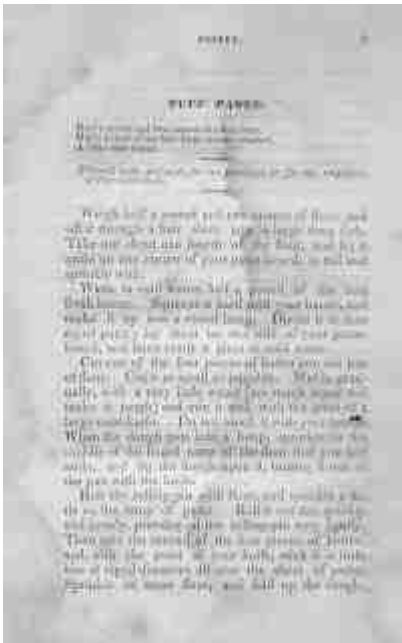
Looking through the books, I've determined that, in the spirit of fall, this week will also be apple themed. I'm planning on making baked apple pudding (for which I'll also need to make a puff paste) from *Seventy-Five Receipts* and cider cake from *The American Frugal Housewife*. The scans of these recipes are reproduced here. From looking at the recipes, which give bare bones instructions, I've determined I need to be flexible and inventive. I also need a kitchen scale.

This is not modern, scientific baking by a long shot. Ovens didn't have exact temperature settings. Egg timers had not yet been invented. As Miss Leslie explains in her introduction, "There can be no positive rules

as to the exact time of baking each article.” This is going to be an adventure.

1. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-HdBMJzht0tE/UFj3g8EgKPI/AAAAAAAAABw/VM94iuxhf6fQ/s1600/Baked+Apple+Pudding.jpg>
2. <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-IBU0d9Pzakk/UFj3dDUqeWl/AAAAAAAAABo/caMAh5SZGZU/s1600/Cider+Cake.jpg>

Puff Paste Instructions (2012-09-23 12:39)


$$[1]$$


[2]

1. <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-7edXDx5Ciec/UF91L4BBYNI/AAAAAAAAACk/tY55Ys48wZQ/s1600/Puff+Paste+1.jpg>
2. <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-UN4wA9kIkrE/UF91PysWbYI/AAAAAAAAACs/k3uFu10PVdQ/s1600/Puff+Paste+2.jpg>

Victory! (2012-09-23 12:55)



[1]

We have victory! I successfully reproduced two historic recipes- baked apple pudding and cider cake. The food looked decent (it certainly looked historical) and received great acclaim from those who tried it.

Wearing a red-checked apron given to me for this project by a thoughtful professor, I felt ready for an episode of *Mad Men*. I headed to the Interfaith House kitchen with a measure of anxiety. The cause of my worry? The puff paste. I'd never made a modern puff pastry before, and the three page instructions in *Seventy-Five Receipts* (which I've posted below) were confusing at best. I ended up relying on a combination of these instructions and the modernized ones in *The Old Sturbridge Village Cookbook*, and achieved great results.

I began with the baked apple pudding, which meant preparing the puff paste first, then stewing the apples. I had gone grocery shopping and managed to find all ingredients except rose water. According to the Internet, I could have gotten rose water if I looked hard enough, but decided that the average family using the book may not have had all ingredients. It was all in the spirit of flexibility. I next moved on to the cider cake, which would have been a challenge without the kitchen scale. After measuring out .5 of the 1.5 pounds of flour the recipe called for, I decided to halve the recipe. Though the unusually thick batter had me worried at first, it was otherwise an easy, straightforward process.



[2]

Among my taste-testers, the consensus was that the baked apple pudding was the more exciting dish. Essentially applesauce baked into a pie, the lemon peel provided an intriguing flavor combination. I can't help but

wonder what rose water would have done for taste; perhaps I'll find out as I prepare a selection of recipes again for my end-of-year presentation. The cider cake batter had a great apple flavor to it, but it was more or less cooked off during baking. We determined that the cake would pair well with coffee. Both dishes were extremely hardy. After trying each, we felt full and ready for an afternoon of tilling fields or building stonewalls.

As expected, the process required a good amount of guesswork, flexibility, and trusting of instincts, but the session was not nearly as difficult as I thought it might be. Thanks to all who came to help me convert measurements, make subjective decisions, and provide moral support. All are welcome to come visit/taste, every other Friday (generally starting at one) at the Trinity Interfaith House. This project gets more exciting every day!

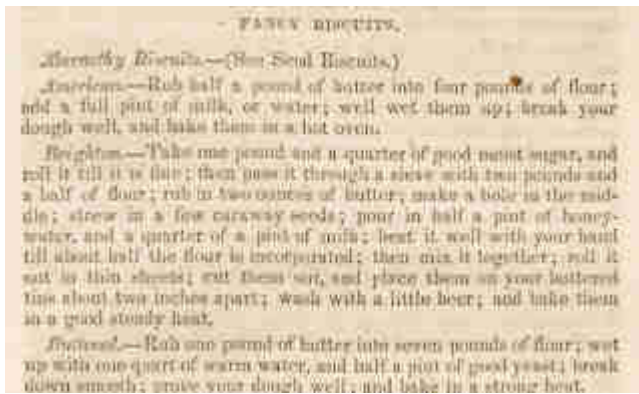
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1.2 October

Fancy Biscuits (2012-10-01 12:08)

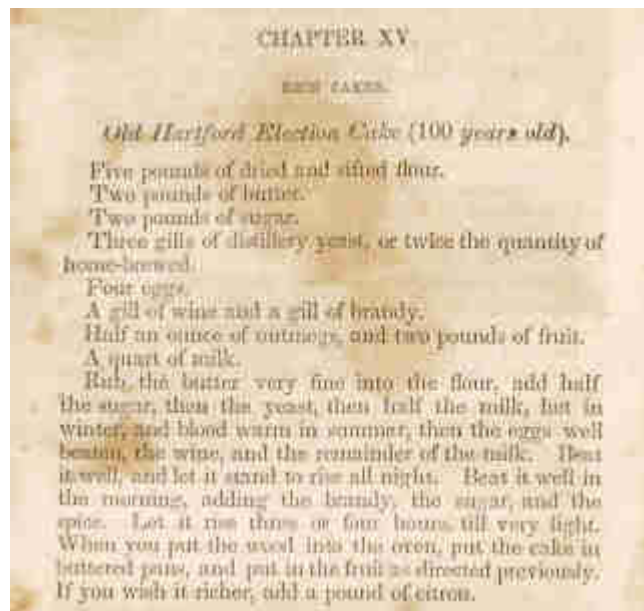


[1] In the summer, when I was first searching the Watkinson catalogue for cookbooks to use, I came across one that gave my roommate and I quite a few laughs. Especially when read aloud. The title of the book, in verbose 19th-century style, was *The Complete confectioner, pastry-cook, and baker : plain and practical directions for making confectionary [sic] and pastry, and for baking : with upwards of five hundred receipts consisting of directions for making all sorts of preserves, sugar-boiling, comfits, lozenges, ornamental cakes, ices, liqueurs, waters, gum-paste ornaments, syrups, jellies, marmalades, compotes : bread-baking, artificial yeasts, fancy biscuits, cakes, rolls, muffins, tarts, pies, &c. &c. / with additions and alterations by Parkinson, practical confectioner, Chestnut Street*. For whatever reason, what we found the most humorous about the title was the term “fancy biscuits.” That night, I made a promise to my friend that fancy biscuits were one thing I would definitely make. Thus, one recipe for week two is decided.



[2] *The Complete Confectioner* was published in Philadelphia in 1844, but is on the border when it comes to my rule of sticking to cookbooks written and published in America. The introduction explains, “The basis for our little work is to be found in *Read’s Confectioner*, a late London publication.” However, the American adapters continue, “We have been able to make from our own experience many important modifications and to introduce many additional receipts, particularly in relation to the various articles of luxury which the bounty of our soil and climate.” Despite the debt it owes to British writers, this is another fiercely proud American cookbook. As such, I’ll be trying out the recipe for American fancy biscuits.

Sticking to cookbooks from the 19th century, leading up to the Civil War, the other book I’ll be using this week is Catherine Beecher’s 1856 *Domestic Receipt Book*. Beecher’s *Receipt Book* was, “Designed as a Supplement to her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*.” Catherine Beecher, though never married, was famous for her domestic advice and belief in separate spheres. She argued that, though men and women should stick to unique types of work, these areas should be equally respected. She therefore strove to make housework more scientific and more able to gain respect in a traditional sense. This is reflected in the cookbook, which includes many diagrams of kitchen tools and wordy chapters on kitchen theory.



[3] Looking through the table of contents in the *Domestic Receipt Book*, I lighted on Beecher’s Old Hartford Election Cake, which she describes as being 100 years old. Beecher was a Hartford resident, so it is no wonder she would include a recipe from our fair city. According to *Washington Post* Blogger Kim O’Donnell, in early America, “Election Day was an important holiday. Voters would take the day off from work and travel to Hartford, cast votes and then party into the night.” Election Day cake, with its basis in European fruitcakes, was an important part of the Election Day tradition. Given the location and time of year, this seemed like a recipe I had to try.

I'll be baking this Friday morning from nine to around noon in the Interfaith House. Feel free to stop by!

1. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-0bP8hlgU08U/UGnpf30i0jI/AAAAAAAAAC8/wiXQbv1fxUU/s1600/Julia2.jpg>
 2. <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-2mPKquEpMTE/UGnpjShMohI/AAAAAAAAADE/ZCajoBdjnsW/s1600/Julia1.jpg>
 3. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-BRi_cnmPKJU/UGnpl3C3JgI/AAAAAAAAADM/xWGr7nLeDdg/s1600/Julia3.jpg
-

Flexibility (2012-10-08 07:53)

Amazingly, I've had another successful cooking day. Things did not start off particularly well. I bought my ingredients, then returned to find that the yeast, which came in those tiny flat packets, had disappeared somewhere between the grocery store scanner and my room. Therefore, the night before I started cooking, I decided my election cake would not include yeast. Yet again, I find that adapting nineteenth-century recipes requires flexibility.



[1] I arrived at the Interfaith House and whipped up the dough for the American Fancy Biscuits. Despite the name, these biscuits are anything but fancy. With flour, butter and milk, my biscuits were essentially little pats of piecrust. Part of the reason for the confusion over what makes a biscuit comes from the etymology of biscuit versus the etymology of cookie. The Oxford English Dictionary explains that, in early America, the English term “biscuit” and the Dutch word *koekje* (from which we get “cookie”) were used interchangeably. In nineteenth-century America, these terms were still in flux, sometimes meaning the sweet dessert treats and sometimes the flakey dinner rolls. This American Fancy Biscuit, true to its name, is closer to the modern American biscuit than the modern British sweet biscuit. However, some of the other recipes for biscuits in the same section of *Complete Confectioner* vary in type.



[2] The Election Cake was more complex, but leaving out the yeast helped ease the process. I also left out the wine, deciding it would simplify the shopping process. As for the generic fruit called for in the recipe, I chose dried currants and cranberries. Currants certainly would have grown in Connecticut in this era and cranberries fairly nearby in bogs. I am unsure whether the average Hartford family would have easy access to cranberries in 1856, but The Cape Cod Cranberry Grower's Association notes that cranberries were first sent to Europe for sale in the 1820s. Based on the huge quantities of ingredients required by the recipe, I decided to cut it by a *quarter*. A theme I'm noticing emerge is that nineteenth-century cooking seems to have been done on a much larger scale than cooking today. Perhaps this is due to the effort required of baking in the era; might as well make a lasting amount if you're putting the work into firing up the bake oven.

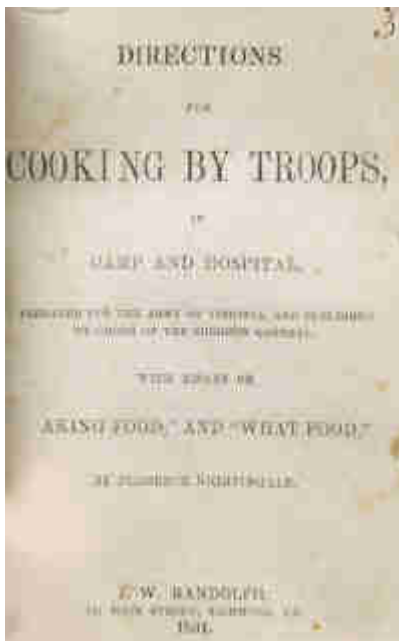


[3]

As for the finished products, the biscuits, though a little bland on their own, would go great with tea, butter, or jam. One of my tasters also mentioned that the biscuits would be good for someone with an upset stomach. Not the highest compliment, but at least they're useful. The Election Cake got favorable reviews as something intriguing and different, with a complex flavor. People seemed to especially appreciate the inclusion of fruits not often found in modern cakes. The cake was, however, very dense and heavy, qualities I think the yeast would have helped negate. Next time a recipe calls for yeast, I'll try to be sure it gets home with me. But, overall, flexibility and experimentation again led to finished products that were edible and interesting.

1. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-F01LSs2Ez5M/UHLn7aDE3ZI/AAAAAAAAADc/116e0Jn15D8/s1600/DSCN2404.JPG>
2. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-wGhxIudIj7U/UHLn_3B1L_I/AAAAAAAAADk/Cuawu812e6I/s1600/DSCN2409.JPG
3. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-du9S9kFTLo8/UHL0Ck5k8DI/AAAAAAAAADs/_ARgVeDhZMo/s1600/DSCN2410.JPG

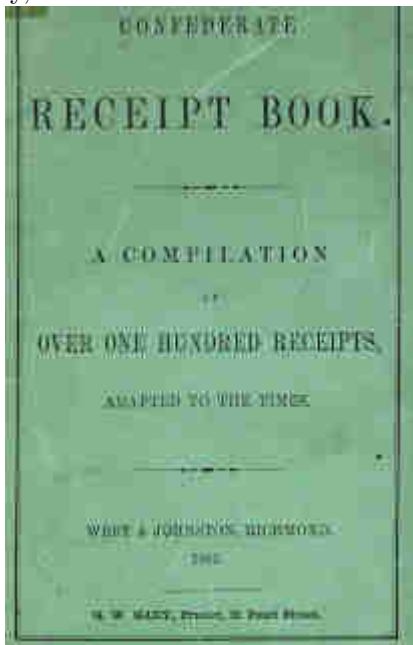
"With God as My Witness..." (2012-10-15 13:08)



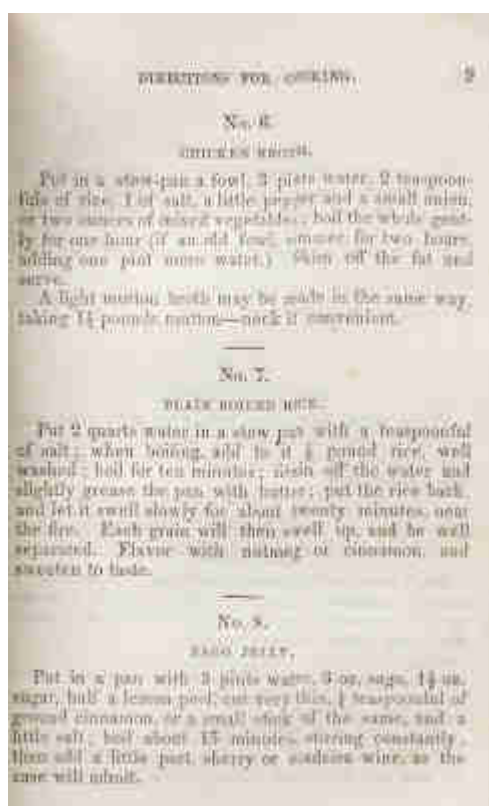
[1]

I've been anticipating this week's theme for a while now- Civil War foods! Whether you find it surprising or not, the majority of Civil War-themed cookbooks in the Watkinson are from the Confederacy. My theory on this is that, because the southern lifestyle was more deeply affected and altered by the events of the Civil War, more literature had to be released on the ways to deal with this fact. And let me tell you, there will be

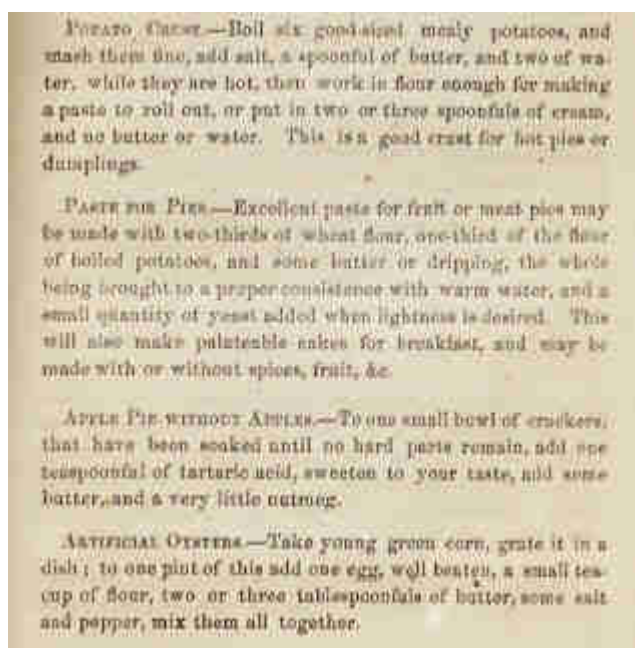
no fancy biscuits this week. In fact, there will be nothing tasty as far as I can tell. It was a time of want for many, and the cookbooks reflect that.



[2] The first of the two books, *Directions for Cooking by Troops, in Camp and Hospital: With Essays on "Taking Food" and "What Food,"* is from 1861 and is allegedly by Florence Nightingale. The second book for this week is the *Confederate Receipt Book: A Compilation of Over One Hundred Receipts, Adapted to the times*. The book has no author but was compiled by the publishers in 1863. Both books were published in Richmond, VA. When I picked up the books, I expected lengthy introductions, telling readers to keep up the faith and to use the advice in these books to do their part to further the Confederate cause. To my surprise, neither had such an introduction. They were exceptionally practical, diving right into advice.



[3] *Cooking by Troops* is contained within a larger collection of five separate pieces of Confederate literature, bound together. The other pieces bound with the cookbook included *Regulations for the Subsistence Department of the Confederate States of America* and “General Order No. 5 of Col. E Van Don.” As the title of the cookbook implies, it is intended for use in the field. The recipes given for field cooking are mostly soups and meats intended “for one hundred men.” This is not the scale of cooking I was planning on doing. The second section of the book is on cooking in hospitals. There are directions here for things like “plain boiled rice,” “rice water,” and the classic “toast and water” (it’s not what you think it is— see recipe on side). In this section, I was intrigued by a food I had never heard of, “sago jelly.” A quick search informed me sago is a type of starch found in palm leaves, and that it is what makes the bubbles in bubble tea. I think that, if I can find sago, this is what I will try to make from this cookbook.



[4] *One Hundred Receipts* is intended for families on the

home front, and includes not just recipes for food, but also for soap, candles, beer, and medical remedies. All have been adjusted to accommodate for a time of want. A personal favorite was for coffee made from acorns. I could try it, but I think that's a little beyond how far into historical authenticity I'm willing to delve. Instead, I'm planning on trying a mock apple pie made in a potato crust, which cuts down on the amount of flour and butter a family would have to use. I found this book fascinating. I guess I didn't realize quite how meager things got in the Civil War until I saw the recipes that the literate, book-buying population was resorting to. As I looked through the makeshift recipes, an image of Scarlet O'Hara formed in my mind, rising from the dirt, proclaiming, "With God as my witness, I'll never be hungry again!"

1. <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-oP0EAbVkbqs/UHxpMd9rwcI/AAAAAAAAEA/GG2raUIcw1E/s1600/Julia+3.jpg>
 2. <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-Zfrn1M47h8g/UHxpYKV9-3I/AAAAAAAAEQ/aeVHwvqZ0eI/s1600/Julia.jpg>
 3. <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-YLfb2MEEgZo/UHxpS-VVxXI/AAAAAAAAEI/L0J0-yHkCjs/s1600/Julia+4.jpg>
 4. <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-LL-Rsq19fMY/UHxpc1UMquI/AAAAAAAAY/aeqZnwJXjDk/s1600/Julia+2.jpg>
-

War is Hell (2012-10-23 06:11)

Of all the work I've done on this project so far, this week's cooking has been the most...interesting.



[1]

I began with the Sago jelly. Which became Tapioca Jelly due to my inability to find sago. The internet informs me that sago and tapioca, though from different sources, are both starches and are used for many of the same things. Going into it, I had no idea what to expect of the process, of the end product, of anything really. If the number one rule of cooking is "be flexible," rule number two is "follow directions." That's exactly what I did as I added tapioca, sugar, port and lemon peel into water and turned up the heat. I stirred and watched as everything coagulated into a gummy mass. It was flubber. It was the blob. It was Civil War Jello. My taste-tasters and I took spoonfuls that proved very difficult to swallow. The taste wasn't bad, a little bland maybe, but pleasant and fruity. However, the texture was almost unmanageable. It had to sit on the tongue and dissolve for a bit before it would go down. Very strange and very inedible in large doses. It is hospital food, and I can see how, if you were incapable of eating much else, this jelly, like modern Jello, might provide nourishment and be easier to manage than some solids. But honestly, it makes one grateful for modern hospital food.

Next, I moved on to "Apple Pie without Apples" in a "Potato Crust." Making the cracker "apple" filling was fairly easy once I had tartaric acid (cream of tartar in modern terms). The potato crust on the other hand, was difficult to make the same consistency as actual crust. It was more like spreadable mashed-potatoes, but the finished product looked more or less like apple pie. The consensus on taste was, that though it was not

very good, it was surprisingly like apples. The potato chunks in the crust even contributed to an apple-like texture. However, those who had tried mock apple pie before suggested that without the potato crust, it would taste more like traditional pie. As it stood, it was more like odd shepherd's pie, described by one friend as "three different flavors of mush."



[2] This is the only cooking session where I ended up with leftovers that needed discarding. Taste-testers said that, if they were in the Civil War, the Apple Pie without Apples would likely be welcome and fortifying, but that they would have to be extremely desperate to make the Jelly worth it. This day of cooking proved to me that food quality is not a forward-progression; it very much depends on circumstance. The recipes of early 1800s peacetime America were much fancier, much more akin to what we would consider good food today. These recipes from the Civil War books were literally the best looking I could find. The desperation, need, and adaptability of people in wartime came across for me stronger in cooking these recipes than ever before. Rarely have I more poignantly felt an appreciation for the ease and comforts of life in modern peacetime America.

Many thanks to my brave taste-testers, assistants, and in this week's case, photographer- later this week, I'll post a photo diary from this cooking session.

1. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-X-Ug39UKIbs/UIaVi7mJBqI/AAAAAAAAAEo/UI08tnKEW8Y/s1600/DSCN2442.JPG>
2. http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-ynhALaQULFA/UIaVp2CS0tI/AAAAAAAAAEw/890Iu_dw7Es/s1600/DSCN2443.JPG

Civil War Cooking In Pictures (2012-10-25 19:30)



[1] The early stages of jelly



[2] "Pouring" the jelly



[3] Jelly Reaction Shot #1



[4] Jelly Reaction Shot #2



[5]

Transition to the mock apple pie



[6]

Making the potato crust



[7]

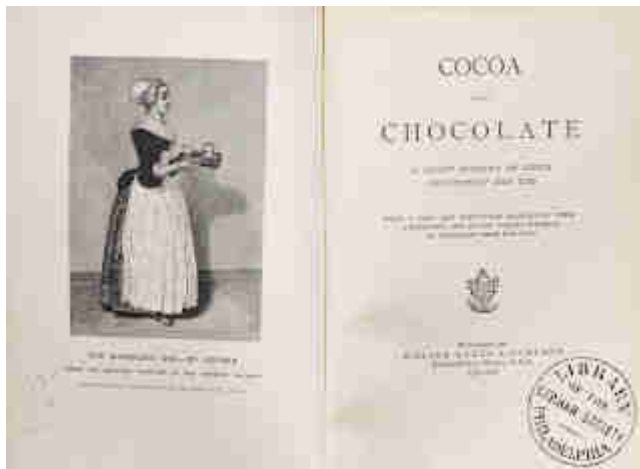
Adding the mock apple[8]



Finished Product

[9]

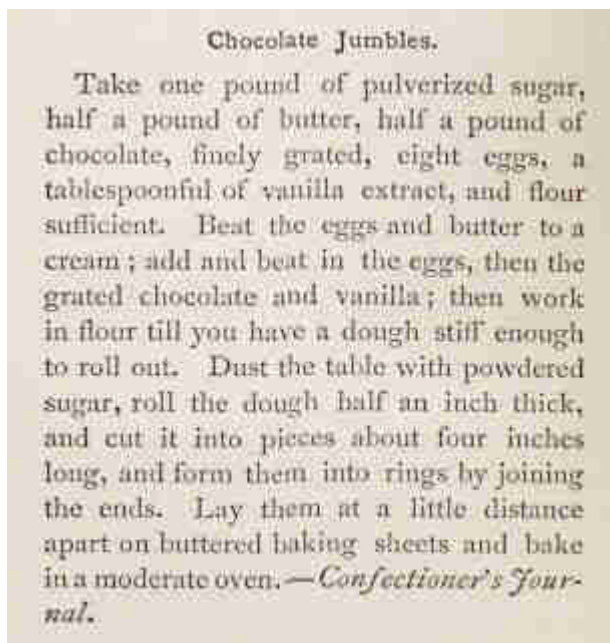
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[1] Now that my project and I have survived the Civil War, its time to turn to happier days. This week, I'll conclude the nineteenth century with two fantastic cookbooks, 1886's *Cocoa and Chocolate: A Short History of their Production and Use with a Full and Practical Account of the Properties, and of the Various Methods of Preparing Them For Food* by Walter Baker and Company and 1887's *Boston School Kitchen Text-Book: Lessons in cooking for the use of classes in public and industrial schools*. Both are entirely different from the cookbooks thus far, which have genuinely been intended as helping hands, supplements for families already capable in the kitchen. These books represent a transition to the modern, when commercial interests and attempts to teach otherwise incompetent cooks take over.

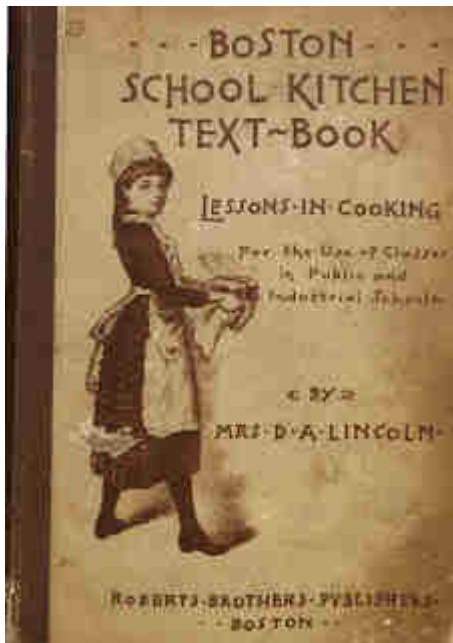
Cocoa and Chocolate had me at the title. This specialty dessert cookbook, bound in luxurious chocolate brown, represents leaps and bounds from Civil War era cuisine. The first half discusses the history and science of chocolate production, with a surprising amount of detail. The introduction to the book explains:

"During the last half-century, the consumption of chocolate has increased to an extraordinary extent, both in this country and Great Britain; This is due to several causes, among the most prominent of which are, (1) a reduction in the retail price, which brings it within the means of the poorer classes, (2) a more general recognition of the value of cocoa as an article of diet, and (3) improvements in methods of preparation, by which it is adapted to the wants of different classes of consumers."

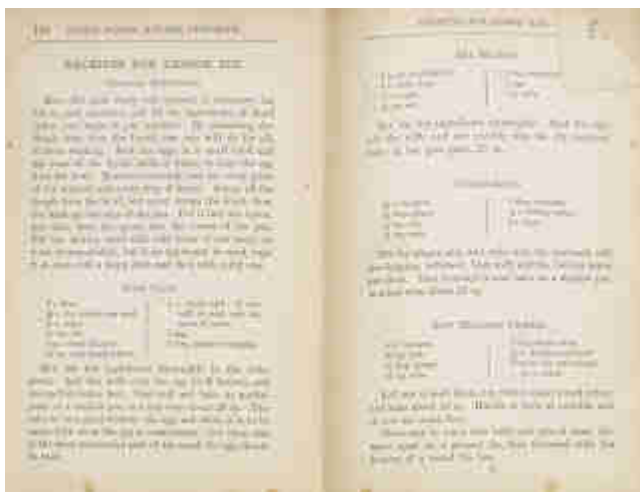


[2] It took me a long time to realize that the Baker's that

released this book was actually Baker's Chocolate Company, the Baker's that still sells popular baking chocolate today. The whole book is an advertisement for Bakers. I felt a little betrayed, fooled into believing this was a non-commercial publication, but not enough to change my chocolate course- I'll be making chocolate jumbles this week. An interesting side note is that the Library of the German Society of Philadelphia was the original holder of this copy.



[3] The second book, the *Boston School Kitchen Textbook*, caught my attention for the view of cooking it advocated, which differed widely from what I had been dealing with. For the first time, I'll be using exact modern measurements, ingredients separated from directions, and detailed instructions. The book includes an introduction by Superintendent of Boston Public Schools and one by the author, Mrs. D. A. Lincoln. Mrs. Lincoln explains, "Much of the dislike which many girls have for cooking arises from their want of success...Cooking cannot be done by guess work. There is a right and a wrong way." This is followed by thorough scientific discussions of various cooking methods, separated into lessons, complete with questions for students at the end of each chapter. I'll be making the gingerbread from Lesson XIII of this cookbook.



[4] Mrs. Lincoln's quote on "right and wrong" methods of cooking bothers me. Cooking takes confidence and adaptability. With most foods, it is difficult to screw up to the point of inedibility. By telling Americans that there is only *one* way of doing things, cookbooks have scared generations away from doing things themselves. Cooking hasn't always been this way, my experiences so far show that. My advice to American home chefs is: embody the cooking ideals of the early nineteenth-century; go forth with confidence! One last side note: the illustrations accompanying these two

cookbooks are eerily similar. Each illustration focuses on a girl, shown from the side, carrying a tray of baked goods, wearing a white apron and cap. I'm not sure what these similarities mean, but they certainly seem significant.

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-

1.3 November

Delicious (2012-11-07 06:53)



[1]



[2]

This week was, to put it simply, delicious. Especially after last week. Civil War hospital jelly cannot hold a candle to chocolate jumbles and gingerbread. I began with the jumbles. Luckily, I spotted a fatal typo in the directions before it could ruin the recipe. It instructed me to add the eggs twice, when the first time, it really wanted the sugar. The hardest part of the recipe? Grating the chocolate. It took a substantial amount of time and effort to grate the four Baker's squares down to size. Thanks to the three friends who helped, and made it so each of us only had to grate one square. The efforts were certainly worth it though, as the batter (pictured on the left, in all its glory) smelled heavenly. It also proved a challenge to add the "flour sufficient" to the batter. The "flour sufficient" would theoretically turn the dough to a consistency that could be rolled out like piecrust. It never reached that point, but did get to a state where I could flatten and cut it into strips. This recipe, like many I've done for this project, required a good deal of interpretation and guess work.

The gingerbread was probably the most straightforward and modern recipe I've worked with thus far. I had no problems following the instructions and there were no challenges with ambiguous steps or processes simply not done in modern kitchens. But unfortunately, no problems also means no real stories to put in the blog. I feel like the Boston cooking textbook really represents a leap into modern cooking in a way that will make my experimentation a little less exciting.



[3] As for end products, I was surprised by people's reactions to the chocolate jumbles. To me, the cookies were chock full of fudgey goodness. They looked like little donuts, as the powdered sugar topping them had melted into a glaze in the oven. But only about half the people who tried them really loved them. The other half said they were just okay, often noting that the chocolate flavor was different than they were used to. I think the consensus was that the chocolate was a little bitter. No offense to those folks, but I think one has to be a chocolate connoisseur to appreciate the recipe. You have to enjoy a rich cocoa flavor for its own sake, and not for the sugar added. As for me, these jumbles are certainly going into my repertoire for the future.



[4] The gingerbread, on the other hand, was a universal success. Again, I think it relates to familiarity and modernity of the recipe. It reminded many people of grandparents and holidays and all such wonderful things. Some people did comment that it was some of the densest gingerbread they had ever tasted, but didn't seem to mind. This is consistent with my experiences of 19th century recipes being extremely dense. Though I may be moving into more modern recipes, they still produce foods that are extremely hardy and filling, able to prepare people for a day of physical labor.

Overall, I think both recipes had great results and both will stay in my personal cookbook for future occasions. I've already had a request from home to make a historic dessert for Thanksgiving.

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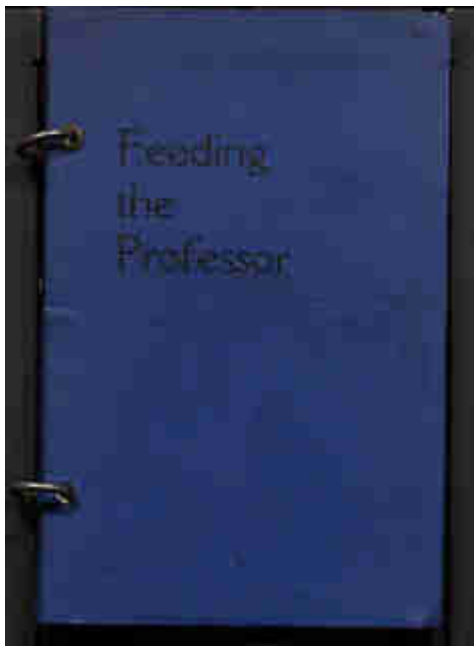
Valerie Horowitz (2013-04-13 05:28:36)

Could you please provide the gingerbread recipe that you used? And its source? My son is doing an 8th grade social studies project on Civil War soldier's diets and we will be making hardtack, johnnycakes and gingerbread to bring to class. We know the kids won't like the hardtack or johnnycakes, but hope they will enjoy the gingerbread. It sounds like the recipe you made tasted good, so we would like to be able to use it if possible. Lots of the other historic recipes we've found don't sound too tasty! Thank you very much.

Julia (2013-04-16 12:26:12)

Thanks for your feedback! You're son's project sounds exciting and right up my alley. The recipe and its source can be found in my October 30 entry, "Culinary Changes"- If you click on the image of the recipe it will blow up to be full screen. It's from 1887's Boston School Kitchen Textbook. Let me know if you have other questions. I enjoyed the gingerbread & think your son's class will too!

The Heritage of Heritage (2012-11-12 07:17)

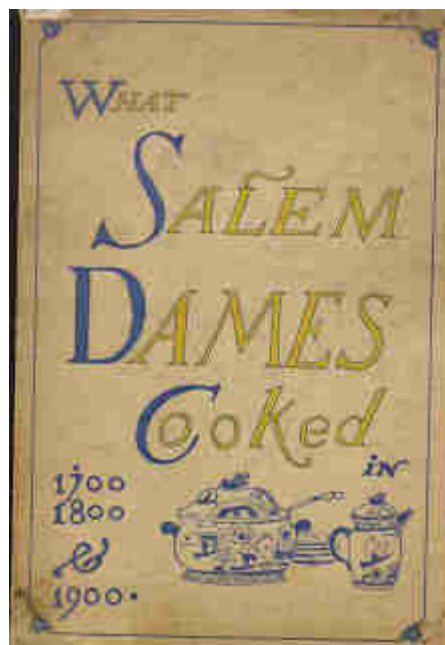


[1] I was excited to examine this week's cookbooks, 1900's *Feeding the Professor* by the Yale Faculty Wives Guild, and 1910's *What Salem Dames Cooked* by the Esther C. Mack Industrial School. Both book topics seemed hyper-specialized and rather bizarre. I have to admit, I was a little disappointed at the lack of theme carried through in these books. I expected detailed descriptions of why this recipe was more suited for academics, and why witches favored that recipe. What I got was serious-minded collections, with content not all that different from your average *Joy of Cooking*.



[2]

Feeding the Professor-what a classic title! Showcasing the era when academia was limited to men, and their wives stayed home and cooked. It also calls out professors as an entirely different breed, one that must be “fed” differently than your average fellow. Unfortunately, the book itself offers little insight to its intent, the choice of title, or why these recipes are particularly appropriate for professors. The only explanation given is, “Some of the housekeepers of New Haven have given up secret recipes held for generations.” In looking through the recipes, I did notice a pattern of internationally focused foods- Dutch Pie Cake, Hungarian Horns, Coffee Bavarian Cream. Perhaps in marketing this as an academic’s cookbook, the wives were catering to a crowd that wanted to be elite and worldly. Interestingly enough, in contrast to the pattern I’ve seen of recipes becoming more and more detailed over time, these recipes have less specific instructions. Maybe these faculty wives were so accomplished and had so little to do that they had absolutely mastered the basics of proper cooking, and assumed others had too. I’ll be attempting the recipe with the intriguing, though somewhat disturbing title, *Cakes the Children Cry For*.



[3]

The title *What Salem Dames Cooked* left me looking for the kind

of witch-focused kitsch associated with Salem today. I hoped the book would show me the origins of that tourist-trapping fictionalization of the most infamous events of Salem's history. I was a little sad when I found that the cookbook was written as straight, serious history. Though I found no recipes calling for eye of newt, I did find a direct predecessor of this very project! The book includes recipes from three historic cookbooks, *The Compleat Cook's Guide* from 1683, *The Frugal Housewife or Complete Woman Cook* from 1730, and *Old Grandmother's Cookbook* from 1800. There is also a section of recipes from women in Salem at the time the book was published. People in turn-of-the-century Salem were evidently interested in seeing how people used to cook, making sure that was not lost. The people of Salem in 1910, were apparently intrigued by trying out historic recipes, just as I am. From this book, I'll be attempting Maple Creams from the 1900 section of the book.



[4]

Both these books, though lacking prefaces that would explain the ideological basis of the themes, show a shifting view of the importance of heritage. The Yale Faculty Wives Guild is interested in creating something that preserves recipes that have been “held for generations,” and the Salem cookbook does the same. And here I am, adding another layer to the already complex history of the culinary landscape. It’s exciting to see my predecessors in these books, those who were interested in culinary history and preservation of that heritage long before me.

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[1]

I started this cooking session with Cakes the Children Cry For, as they required the most ingredients and seemed the more complex. As I mentioned in my last post, *Cooking for the Professor* included surprisingly few directions, and this posed somewhat significant challenges with this recipe. I was unsure at which points to stir and mix. By the end, I was wary about adding the full four cups of flour for which the recipe called; the batter was getting to the point where I almost bent the spoon, but I persevered. And once again, I got the sense of changing definitions of culinary vocabulary, as I found that the *single* instruction included: “Drop with spoon on lightly buttered paper and bake,” created what we today might consider a number of large cookies.

As I prepared to make Maple Creams, I remembered the last time I had used the pot on the stove- Sago Jelly. I hoped this experience would be more favorable, although I still was not sure what consistency or form my final product would take. Following the instructions, I added maple and cream and turned on the heat. As it boiled up, the lovely aroma of a New England sugarhouse filled the room. I was waiting until the mixture in the pot, as the recipe instructed was “on the point of spinning a thread.” I stirred and waited to see if I could find this point, when the steam suddenly turned to smoke, spreading a pungent burning smell throughout the kitchen. I immediately removed it from heat, knowing I had missed the sweet spot. I suddenly had an appreciation for the era of candy thermometers, when you boil something to a particular temperature given to you rather than using guess work to find a point that is more or less subjective. Next, I poured the sticky mixture into a buttered pan. It did not fill the whole space, nor spread very thickly. I was again wondering what the final product would be like. As it cooled, it hardened, and I used a buttered knife to cut it into small pieces before it fully solidified. The end product was extremely brittle, pretty much a hard candy. In a moment of panic, I thought the cooled candy would never come out of the pan it was boiled in. But thankfully, warm soapy water did the trick.



[2]

As for taste, the Cakes the Children Cry For had an extreme molasses flavor. Not really the kind of thing a child would go crazy for in an era of Pixie Stix and Coco Puffs. But at the turn of the century, perhaps the cakes would have been a real treat for kids. Generally, adults liked them and I found a surprising amount of people who were excited about the molasses flavor. As with my other baked goods, the little cakes were extremely thick and hardy. Though I was unsure about the recipe at first, the Cakes came together decently. The maple candies, despite my misadventure with burning, still turned out to be quite tasty- the burning gave them a complex smoky flavor that could be enjoyed while it melted in one's mouth. In my experience you're either a total maple-lover or aloof. In the eyes of maple lovers, nothing with maple flavor can be less than excellent- that was the case with these candies, which won great acclaim from my maple-loving friends. If I were to do this recipe again, I would do some research into hard candy making, temperature, and cooking thermometers.

At the same time that I am getting used to cooking with few instructions, it still catches me off-guard sometimes. I expected recipes to get more and more detailed and user-friendly as I moved forward through time. The recipes this week were two of the most challenging I've produced this far, partly due to lack of directions and partly due to lack of modern cooking tools. One possible explanation for the increased difficulty is intended audience for the cookbooks. I worked with two specialty cookbooks this week- one geared towards Yale housewives and one towards women in Salem, Massachusetts interested in domestic history. Members of both those populations likely had a solid basis in domestic science. All I know for certain is that, though I've moved into the twentieth century, the recipes haven't gotten any easier.

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Chocolate Jumbles- Thanksgiving Edition (2012-11-25 18:37)

As previously mentioned, my mother asked me to bake one of my historic recipes for dessert this Thanksgiving. I chose one of my personal favorites, the Chocolate Jumbles from the 1886 *Cocoa and Chocolate*. This time, however, I had my mother as helper, and learned just how important it is to learn cooking from someone else. Of course my mom had never made Jumbles before, but as a more experienced cook than I, she had some tips and insight that made the experience different than the first.



[1] My first attempt at Jumbles...

I told my mom about people's responses to the first Jumbles- that many people found the cocoa flavor to be just too much. She suggested something obvious that I never would have thought of on my own- reducing the amount of chocolate. Thus the process of experimentation and revision, that makes a recipe something difficult to keep a permanent record of, began.

My mother's next insight came as I was adding "flour sufficient" to turn the consistency of the dough into something like piecrust. The last time, after adding seemingly endless cups of flour, my friends and I gave up and just worked with sticky dough. My mother, of infinite patience, kept adding flour, trusting that, if the recipe said it should get to a piecrust point, it would get to a piecrust point. And she was right! After adding a whole heckuva lot of flour, the dough reached a point where it could be rolled out and cut into strips. As a result, the cookies looked and tasted a lot smoother than those from my previous attempt.



[2] ...compared with my Thanksgiving Jumbles.

I brought the Jumbles to Thanksgiving. They were a great talking point for our family friends, and were seemingly enjoyed by all. So what did I learn? Don't be afraid to alter recipes to accommodate others' tastes. Have patience when cooking. Always listen to your mother. And most relevant to this project, that we can never really know what these recipes were like originally. Everyone has a different interpretation of how to

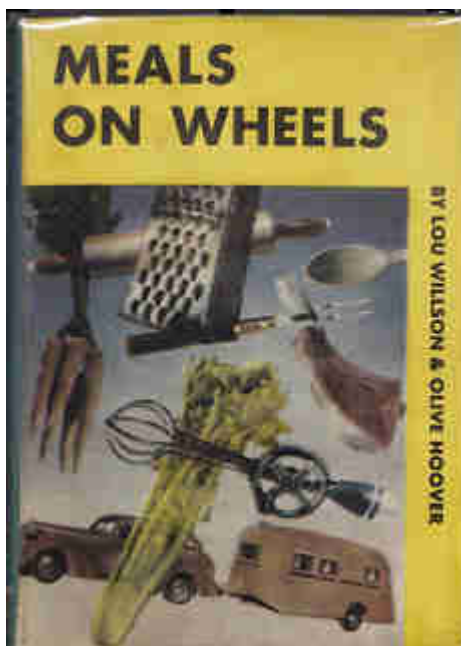
follow a recipe. The chocolate jumbles people made in 1886 likely varied from house to house, just as my chocolate jumbles differed from those I made with my mom. Food history, like history overall, is incredibly complex. It comes to us in terms that require substantial individual interpretation, and we must be careful to remember that this is our interpretation only, not how things actually were.

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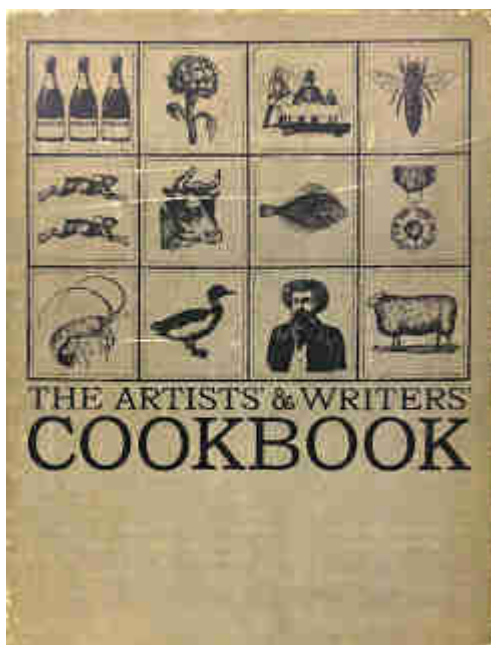
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1.4 December

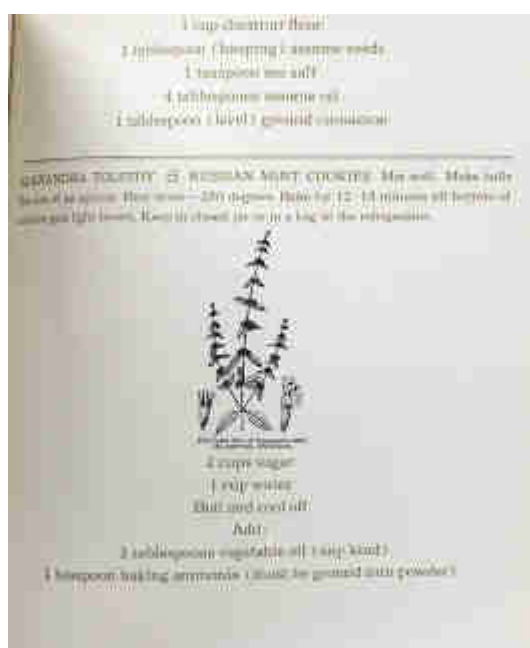
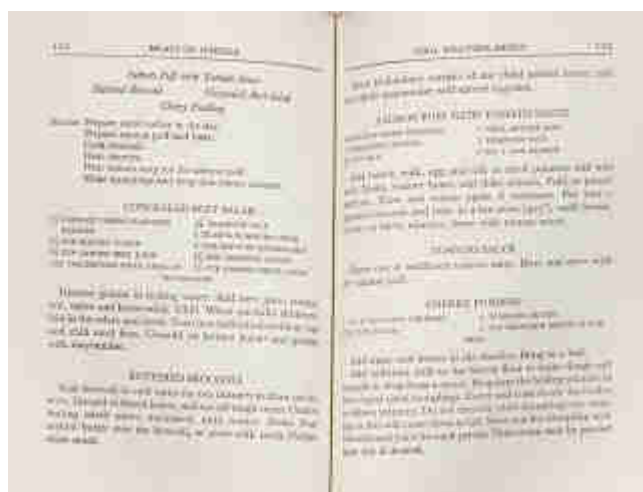
Modern Times (2012-12-03 11:58)

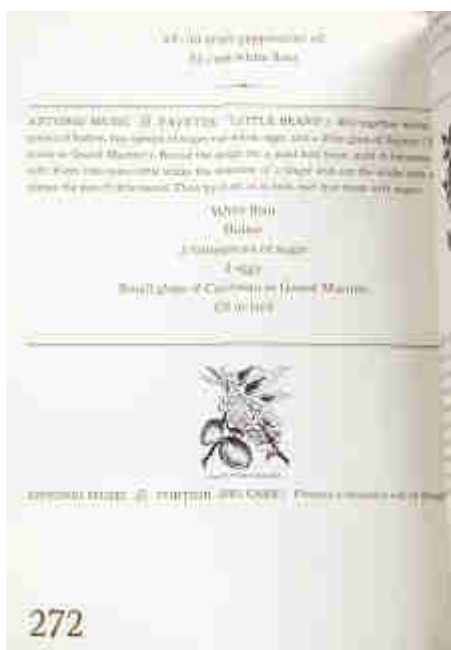


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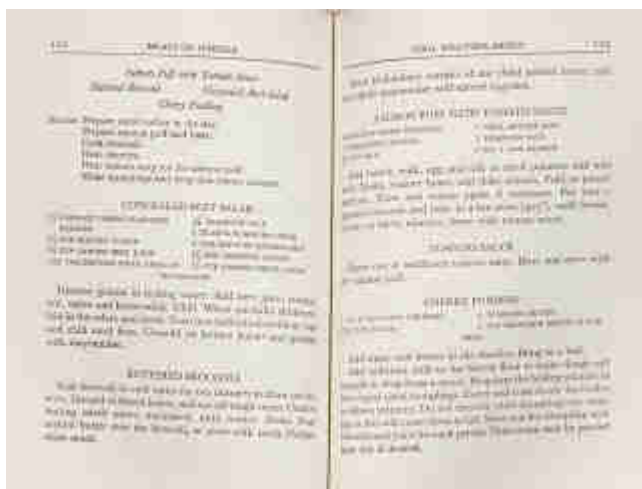


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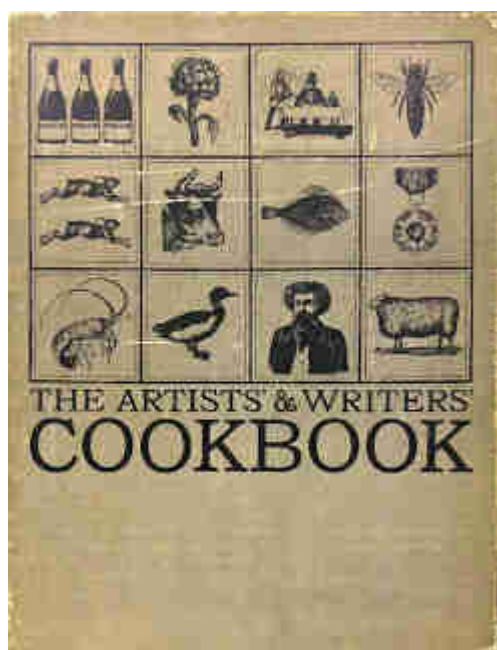




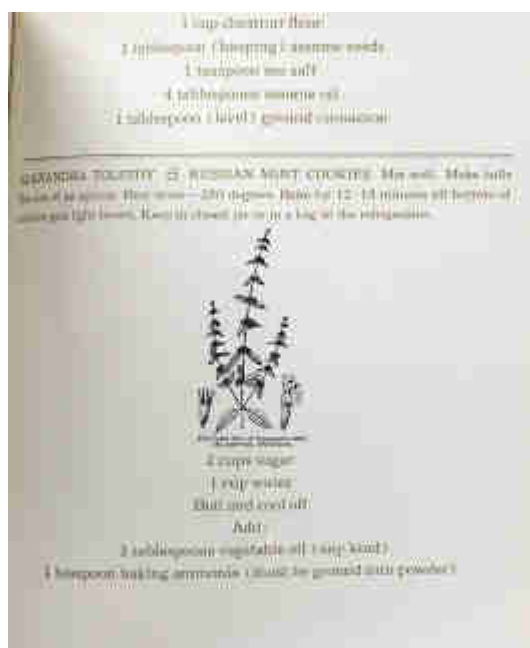
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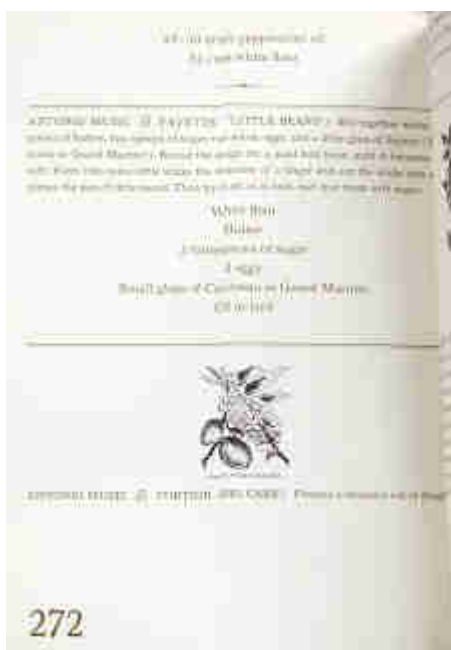
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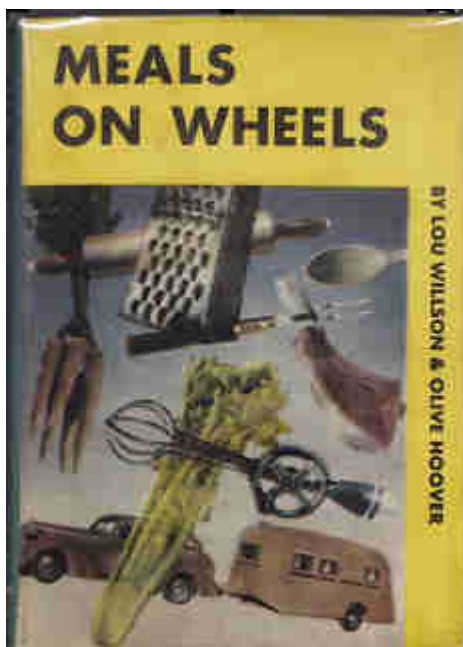
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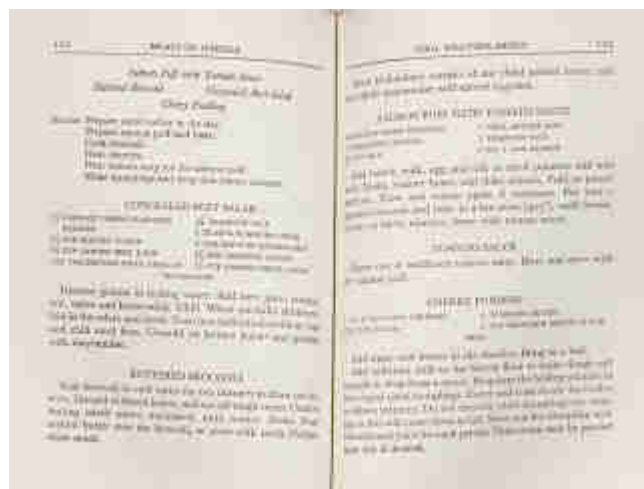
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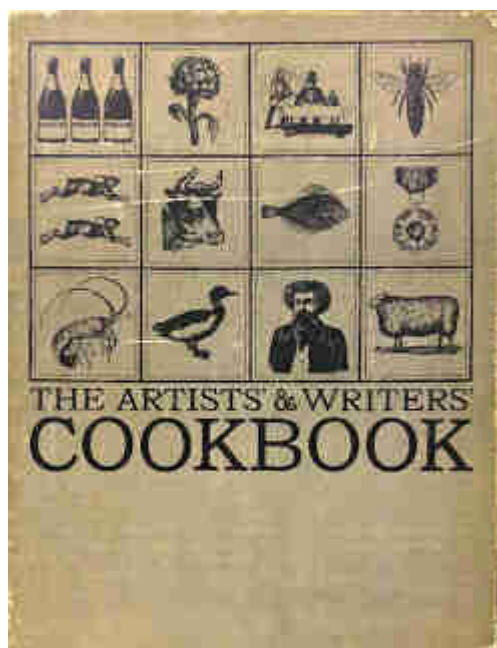
[1]

Hard to believe, but this is my last cooking session! And it promises

to be an exciting one, with two fascinatingly themed books: 1937's *Meals on Wheels* by Lou Wilson and Olive Hoover (fans of *Little Miss Sunshine*, do you think the screenwriter had a copy of this cookbook?) and 1961's *Artists' and Writers' Cookbook* edited by Beryl Barr and Barbara Turner Sachs. These two cookbooks are uniquely specific and undoubtedly modern.

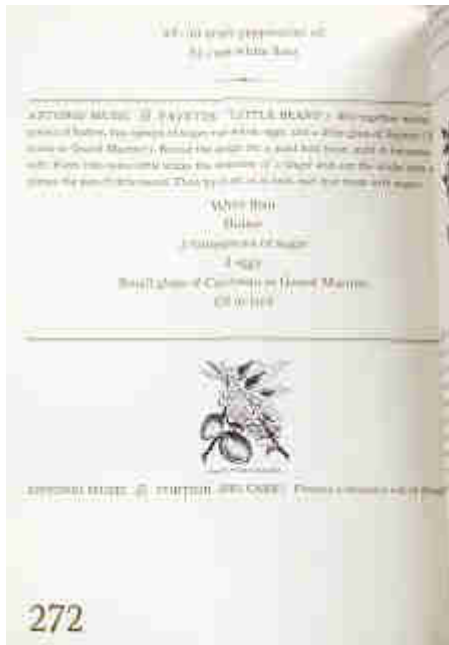


[2] *Meals on Wheels* was written in the midst of the Depression. Therefore, one might assume it would include tips for families who have had to economize and start traveling the nation in trailers. On the contrary, the book completely ignores the tough economic times, and seems to be more of a guide to keeping luxury while traveling cross-country, advising readers that these tips will help make their “vacation enjoyable.” It is concerned not with economy, but with solving “the difficulties of cooking in a small space” and breaking up the apparent monotony of meals served in trailers. To give adequate variety to trailer meals, recipes are pre-arranged in menus. One thing I was not surprised by was the increased number of references to store-bought ingredients. Certain cake recipes suggest starting with a base of “bakery sponge cake.” The tomato sauce recipe suggests simply using concentrated canned tomato soup. I’ll be making cherry pudding from this cookbook. And the recipe, I can already tell, will not require halving- it makes four portions. We’re entering the era of modern family size. Perhaps the most modern thing about both cookbooks this week? Oven temperatures and cooking times.

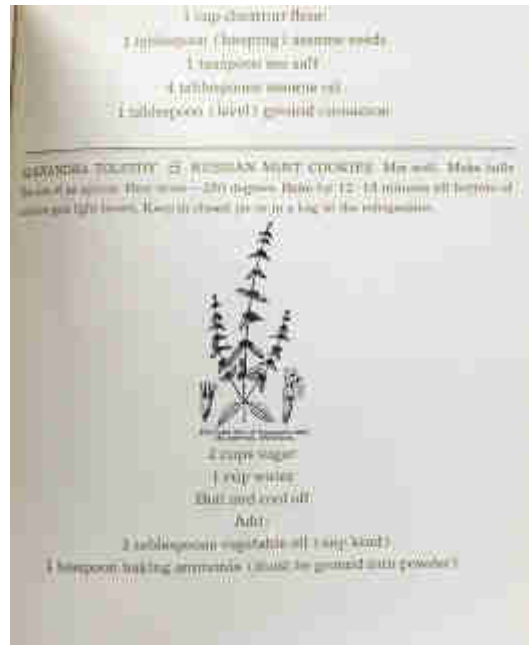


[3] Despite the modernity of *Meals on Wheels*, it seems like one of the biggest leaps in time exists between the two books this week. *Meals on Wheels*, though oddly specific, is still a cookbook in the traditional sense.

The Artists' and Writers' Cookbook reads more like a parody, a subversion of the traditional cookbook. By the time *The Artists' and Writers' Cookbook* came out, *Betty Crocker* had happened (character created in 1921), *The Joy of Cooking* had happened (1936), suburbia had happened. *The Artists' and Writers' Cookbook* responds to all these trends, with a beautifully decorated art book, for which the editors went and asked those of the creative elite to submit some of their favorite family recipes or a story related to cooking. My personal favorite is the “Menu for a Dadaist Day” by Man Ray. The menu is mostly composed of “children’s blocks” and “ball bearings.” To my taste-testers: be grateful I didn’t settle on one of these recipes!



[4]



[5]

The book includes recipes from figures as diverse as Harper Lee, Upton Sinclair, Marianne Moore, Conrad Aiken, and Burl Ives. The forward, by Alice B. Toklas, explains, “It is an enchanting book. The writers write as they write. The painters write as they paint.” The introductory line of the book is “Dedicated to imperfection in the kitchen,” which those of you who have been keeping up with the blog know is something I hold dear, making this the perfect book for me to end my historic cooking experiences with. From this book, I’ll be making Russian Mint Cookies, from a recipe by Alexandra Tolstoy, “the authoritative biographer of her father,” Leo. Alexandra also published her own memoir, *I Worked for the Soviets*. At the time she submitted this recipe, she had moved to New York and was working as curator for the Tolstoy Museum. After having just seen *Anna Karenina* in theaters this past weekend, I’m excited to try these festive-sounding cookies from the Tolstoy family for myself.

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Last Cooking Day (2012-12-11 18:25)



[1]

Well the last cooking day is done and it was a success! Many, many thanks to my friend Megan, who I think saved the day. Before I started, I showed Megan the recipes and she commented on the “prepared biscuit flour” required by the cherry pudding. I told her I interpreted it as a *type* of flour—like bread flour, pastry flour—and I thought all-purpose flour would be fine. “No,” she said, “I’m pretty sure that means something like Bisquick, something for ready-made biscuits. But you have all the materials for biscuits here. Do you want me to whip a biscuit base up for you?” And she did. And the dish was saved. This is why cooking should be a communal activity. Thanks again Megan!



[2]

Thanks also to the friends who lent their good judgment for how long the pudding had to be boiled. More like modern dumplings, the word pudding historically refers to any boiled dish made with flour. Though I was at first skeptical of the little boiled clumps, they tasted surprisingly wonderful, especially served with the warm cherry sauce poured over the top. They tasted like

little dumplings in sweet cherry sauce.



[3] The Russian Mint Cookies probably required the least interpretation of any dish I made with this project. The cooking time and temperature were great to have. The recipe was simple, straightforward, and even edible for my vegan friends. There was only one ingredient that proved a challenge, baker's ammonia, which should be available in specialty cooking stores, but as with the sago, I did not have the time to seek it out. I am once again grateful to the internet for letting me know that baker's ammonia is a leavener which makes cookies and crackers extra-crisp. Another website advised using equal parts baking powder and soda as a substitute for baker's ammonia. I figured I might as well try it. I think this is part of the reason my cookies rose like biscuits, but they did have nice crisp shells. The finished product tasted great, the mint flavor was there, but not overwhelming: just right. I would say the mint flavor makes this a great festive cookie for the holiday season. All in all, the day was another delicious success.

This is technically my last blog entry for this project, but I may keep up with it more sporadically just for fun. This project has been amazing. It has been a bright spot in my day, teaching me not just about historic foodways but also a great deal about my friends (and at the risk of sounding corny) myself. I learned about being brave in the kitchen. I learned about how much easier cooking is nowadays with modern detailed cookbooks. Thanks to all who have helped, taste-tested, kept up with my blog, etc.! I couldn't have done it without you. Thanks also to the Watkinson Library for giving me the chance to try this wonderful project. I advise others to go forth and explore their own "art of imperfection in the kitchen"!

1. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-Rzt1KfmorXA/UMfnQ-SWazI/AAAAAAAAAKs/YK3Yx_9mSQs/s1600/DSCN2471.JPG
2. <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-rrabAAUm15s/UMfnTp0uUWI/AAAAAAAAAK0/CzUzccZ2xEI/s1600/DSCN2474.JPG>
3. <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-dbyWUYdKLaa/UMfnYPb70RI/AAAAAAAAAK8/Uv4QWPz-J4E/s1600/DSCN2476.JPG>

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